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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 003007

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DEPT FOR S/SRAP, SCA/A

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/13/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MCAP](#) [PTER](#) [AG](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: SRAP HOLBROOKE - MOD DIR GORBUNOV NOV 16 MEETING  
ON AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: DCM Eric Rubin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: SRAP Ambassador Holbrooke met Russian MOD Director for International Cooperation Gorbunov to discuss the U.S. strategic approach in Afghanistan. Holbrooke said security was a precondition for the success of U.S. and international efforts at the reconstruction of Afghanistan and outlined U.S. plans for creating effective Afghan security forces. Gorbunov and his uniformed colleagues expressed some skepticism over the viability of the U.S. plans, and wondered if the U.S. would ever withdraw from the region. Gorbunov added that further Russian support for training and equipping Afghan security forces would require political direction from President Medvedev. End summary.

¶2. (C) U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Ambassador Richard Holbrooke met November 16 with Russian Ministry of Defense Director of International Cooperation Alexander Gorbunov. Ambassador Holbrooke outlined the U.S. strategic approach in Afghanistan and the congruence of U.S. and Russian interests in the long-term stability of Afghanistan and the region. Holbrooke stressed that he wanted to intensify our bilateral dialogue on Afghanistan and Pakistan.

¶3. (C) Ambassador Holbrooke explained that the U.S. was in Afghanistan simply because of September 11 and the resulting need to destroy Al Qaida. He said neither the U.S. nor NATO are seeking a permanent base, citing U.S. public opinion in support of withdrawal from the region at the earliest opportunity. The U.S. is determined not to abandon Afghanistan as it did in 1989 and almost did again in 2004.

¶4. (C) Ambassador Holbrooke said the U.S. strategy was to destroy Al Qaida and, to the extent it supported Al Qaida, the Taliban. This strategy provides the Afghanistan national security forces (ANSF) and government the time and space to become strong and self-reliant. Ambassador Holbrooke said that President Obama had not yet decided how many additional U.S. troops to send to Afghanistan. The U.S. goal was to increase, train and strengthen the Afghanistan National Police and Army so that these institutions would be able to successfully counter a low-level insurgency. Our goal was to do this by 2013, though Ambassador Holbrooke acknowledged the enormous difficulty of achieving this within such a short time frame.

¶5. (C) Ambassador Holbrooke said a strong and reliable Afghan security force would allow the U.S. and NATO to withdraw combat forces, leaving behind some troops to conduct training. International economic assistance to Afghanistan would need to continue for several years, the Ambassador stressed. We would not abandon Afghanistan as we had in

¶1989. Throughout history, a weak and unstable Afghanistan had drawn destructive interference from outside powers. With Al Qaida entrenched in North Waziristan and poised to return to Afghanistan, the United States had no option but to make every effort to assist the Afghan Government to establish a stable and independent state.

¶6. (C) Gorbunov noted U.S. success in the rebuilding of the post-war economies of Germany and Japan, as well as some of the Persian Gulf states. When, he asked, did the U.S. expect Afghanistan to become self-sufficient? If this did not happen within the next few years, who would continue to support Afghanistan?

¶7. (C) Ambassador Holbrooke noted the differences between Germany and Japan, who had both started World War II as modern states with cohesive societies and high literacy rates. In contrast, Afghanistan, had only a 20 percent literacy rate. The U.S. did not expect Afghanistan would be able to pay for its security forces any time soon. The U.S. believed it and the rest of the international community would have to foot the bill, which was in their collective interest. Ambassador Holbrooke said the cost of the U.S. military effort was one million dollars per soldier per year, meaning the cost for current U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan was between 100 and 150 billion dollars per year. By comparison, the cost of training and equipping the ANSF was six to eight billion dollars per year.

¶8. (C) Paul Jones, S/RAP Deputy, recounted his recent experience with U.S. marines in Nawa, a town in the heart of

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"Taliban country." Despite continuous skirmishing and several U.S. wounded, security had been established in the area and troops and townspeople were now able to move about freely. Jones noted that the Afghans had only two requests: security and assistance with agriculture. After that, they wanted the Americans to leave.

¶9. (C) Ambassador Holbrooke said Jones' experience was a good example of the U.S. civil-military approach in Afghanistan, but the real problem was the sanctuary in Pakistan for Taliban and Al Qaida. There, the only weapon at hand was the missile-armed Predator drone, which the U.S. and allies had to pretend did not exist, although everyone knows of it.

¶10. (C) Gorbunov said that Russian support in Afghanistan for the training and equipping of ANSF would depend on political decisions made at a high level, likely by President Medvedev. His job, and that of his colleagues at the table, would be to provide advice and formulate recommendations. Colonel Melkov of the MOD Main Directorate for International Military Cooperation asked how the U.S. security plan linked to economic reconstruction of Afghanistan. Ambassador Holbrooke responded that while security was not the only need, it was a precondition for fulfilling others like the rule of law, good governance, demining, prisons, agriculture, and counter-narcotics. The U.S. had over 20 individual plans addressing these issues, Ambassador Holbrooke said, but at the MOD it was important to focus on the U.S. concept for providing security.

¶11. (C) Major General Sukhov, deputy head of the MOD Main Directorate for International Military Cooperation, conceded that U.S. military could defeat Al Qaida and the Taliban, but added that history suggested a U.S. military presence, once established, is not quickly abandoned. If the U.S. really planned to withdraw from Afghanistan, what were its geostrategic aims there beside the destruction of Al Qaida?

¶12. (C) Ambassador Holbrooke, terming Sukhov's question "fascinating," asked Sukhov if he personally believed the U.S. intended to stay in Afghanistan. When Sukhov explained that he wanted to express his doubts about the likely success of U.S. plans, Holbrooke countered this was a different

issue. If the U.S. succeeds in building ANSF that can provide security, then U.S. combat forces will withdraw, leaving troops only for training and reconstruction.

¶13. (C) Ambassador Holbrooke said U.S. presence in Afghanistan had nothing in common with Germany and Japan, citing the German government's request to have U.S. troops remain. While understanding Russian concerns about encirclement based on his experiences with NATO enlargement while Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Ambassador Holbrooke said U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan did not pose any threat to another country, whether Russia, China, or Iran. Sukhov replied that it was not clear to him whether it was in Russia's interest for the U.S. to withdraw or remain in Afghanistan. Ambassador Holbrooke said that the hope was for most of the Allied combat forces in Afghanistan to be gone by 2013.

¶14. (C) Colonel Musk, also of the MOD Main Directorate, asked what role the former Soviet republics in Central Asia and the South Caucasus played in U.S. civil-military plans. Ambassador Holbrooke noted that he had not yet visited any of these countries, although he had been invited by all of them except Kyrgyzstan, because he wanted to discuss U.S. plans in the region with Russia first. While noting that General Petraeus was developing northern supply routes into Afghanistan with some of these countries, Ambassador Holbrooke said he was not working on this or related issues, such as the air base at Manas. He did plan to visit Georgia in the near future as it was sending a battalion to Afghanistan and the Georgians had invited him to inspect it.

¶15. (C) Colonel Melkov asked if the U.S. feared that the arms it was providing to Afghanistan might fall into the hands of the Taliban, or that the ANSF, once trained and equipped, would act counter to U.S. interests. Ambassador Holbrooke agreed these were real worries, but said the immediate concern remained whether the Afghan government could create a capable ANSF. In 2010 the U.S. plans to turn over responsibility for the security of some provinces, as it had been doing in Iraq, to the ANSF. This would be a real test

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for the Afghans. The U.S., Ambassador Holbrooke added, was very aware that it had supported attacks on the Soviet army in Afghanistan by groups whose children were now attacking U.S. and NATO forces.

¶16. (C) Gorbunov thanked Ambassador Holbrooke for his visit, and assured that Russia will remain a reliable and effective partner. The rest, he said, will remain with our political leaders. NOTE: Gorbunov was relieved of his office in early December and replaced, for the time being, by Maj Gen Sukhov. No official explanation for Gorbunov's departure has been given. End note.  
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